

# State of the State: Inslee wants funds for schools, mental health, wildfires

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**Gov. Jay Inslee called Tuesday in his State of the State address for lawmakers to focus this session on K-12 education, mental health and wildfire funding. But Inslee also acknowledged there will be no full plan this year to resolve the state Supreme Court's McCleary decision.**

By [Joseph O'Sullivan](#)

*Seattle Times Olympia bureau*

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee, running for re-election and gearing up for a renewed legislative push, called Tuesday for lawmakers to focus this legislative session on K-12 education, mental health and wildfire funding.

In his State of the State address, Inslee laid out four priorities: raise pay to deal with a statewide teacher shortage; come up with a framework for future K-12 investment; dip into reserves as part of an effort to boost funding to fight wildfires; and invest in the mental-health system, in part by increasing staff at state psychiatric hospitals, adding mobile crisis teams to reach those in need, and spending more to keep people healthy enough to stay out of the hospital and in their communities.

"These aren't nameless, faceless people," Inslee said, noting that the state had urgent short-term needs, but that long term, the mental-health system needs to be strengthened.

On education funding, Inslee acknowledged, as have legislative leaders, that this year's 60-day session will not produce a resolution to the [state Supreme Court's 2012 K-12 funding order](#) known as the McCleary decision.

Instead, in his speech to a joint session of the Senate and House, Inslee pointed to McCleary legislation introduced this year as a first step toward lawmakers and the governor finding a full solution in 2017.

After last year's record-long budget session, lawmakers returned Monday to grapple with the McCleary decision and a variety of other issues.

Legislators last week unveiled a [K-12 education plan](#) that is more of a plan-for-a-plan. Among other things, it establishes an education-funding task force and calls for analysis of how school districts pay for teacher salaries.

But the plan does not spell out how to change the way teachers are paid or how those changes would be funded.

And in a legislative forum last week, lawmakers appeared to step back from last year's consensus of a bipartisan group of state senators that put the price of a fix at [\\$3.5 billion every two years](#).

After holding the state in contempt in 2014 for failing to come up with a full funding plan for K-12 education, the court in August imposed sanctions of \$100,000 a day.

Last year, legislators endured three overtime sessions and a prolonged stalemate over the state's 2015-17 operating budget and other issues and didn't wrap up until July.

Their work produced a [\\$16 billion statewide transportation package](#) and [substantial increases](#) in education funding, including raises for K-12 school employees and state workers. The budget agreement also poured more money into the state's mental-health system and cut college tuition.

Lawmakers appear to have little appetite this year to stay past the 60-day session, but they remain confronted by a variety of pressing issues.

Along with his proposed 2016 supplemental budget, the governor last month announced a plan to raise the state's minimum annual salary for teachers to \$40,000. That would [boost pay for beginning teachers](#) by \$4,300 per year over what is budgeted now for the 2016-17 school year, according to budget documents.

The governor's proposed supplemental budget would draw \$178 million from the state's reserve funds to pay for this year's wildfire costs.

Inslee's plan would also boost funding for the state's wildfire-fighting capabilities, foster-care program and stressed mental-health system.

Inslee's speech Tuesday made quick reference to the Department of Corrections [sentencing-error scandal](#), where up to 3,200 prisoners were mistakenly released early since 2002.

Those responsible for the mistake will be held accountable, said the governor, who also appealed directly to state workers to speak up about problems in their agencies.

*Information from The Seattle Times archives is included in this report. Joseph O'Sullivan: 360-236-8268 or [josullivan@seattletimes.com](mailto:josullivan@seattletimes.com). On Twitter [@OlympiaJoe](#)*